

PINCKNEY'S TWINS

By SEWELL FORD

SAY when I was gettin' myself tangled up in ways that nobody ever thought of before, you can just see Pinckney clear across the board. But I never know him to send out such a hard boathin' hurry call as the one I got the other day. It come first thing in the mornin' too, just about the time Pinckney used to be tearin' off the second coupon from the number card. I hadn't more'n got inside the station door before Swifty Joe says:

"Pinckney's been tryin' to get you on the wire."

"Gee!" says I. "I was stayin' up late last night. Did he leave the number?"

He had, and it was a sixty-cent long distance call, so the first play I makes when I rings up is to reverse the charge.

"That you, Sir?" says he. "Then for goodness' sake come on here on the next train! Will you?"

"House afire? Smoke in your throat, or what?" says I.

"It's those twins," says he.

"Bad as that?" says I. "Then I'll come."

Wasn't I telling you about the pair of mated

orphans that was dropped over to him unexpected,

and how Miss Gertie, the Western Blush rose that

was on the steamer, come to him to help him out?

Well, Pinckney is gone on Miss Gertie, and gettin' farther and farther away every minute. He's planned it out to have the knot tied right away,

the honeymoon over, and have a furnished

home all ready and acquainted with the ready

made family that he starts in with. Great scheme!

Says Pinckney, "I'll lay it down to the ground, because it's different." He goes by accumulatin' a pair of

girls, and then he thinks about getting married.

As the way he talked, I thought it was all settled.

But he was all set to be some hitch.

There wasn't no manation in his buttonhole

when he meets me at the station; he hasn't shaved

since the day he left home, and there's trouble tracks on

his face. "Married life better'n this?"

"Married?" says I. "No such luck. I never

expected to be married to you."

"Is this a dream?" says he. "Is this a dream?"

"It's my own dream," says he.

"Then there's somethin' you don't understand," says I.

"Says I. "So the twins have

been married? Where's Miss Gertie?"

He takes the hard luck cue, and while

he's new place in the tub cart

what's been happenin'. First

he mused his good start with

in such a rush to dash the

solitaire spark on her. She ain't used to Pinckney's jumpy ways. They hadn't been acquainted much more'n a week, and he hadn't gone through any of the prelim's, when he ups and asks her what day it will be and whether she chooses church or parsonage. Course she shies at that, and the next thing Pinckney knows she's taken a train West, leaving him with the twins on his hands, and a nice little note sayin' that while she appreciates the honor she's afraid he won't do.

"And you're left at the post?" says I.

"Yes," says he. "I couldn't take the twins and follow her, but I could telegraph. My first message read like this, 'What's the matter with me?' Here is her answer to that," and he digs up a yellow envelope from his inside pocket.

"Not domestic enough. G." It was short and crisp.

He couldn't give me his come back to that, for he said it covered three blanks; but it was meant to be an ironclad affidavit that he could be just as domestic as the next man, if he only had a chance.

"And then?" says I.

"Reaf it," says he, handin' over Exhibit Two.

"You have the chance now," it says. "Manage the twins for a month, and I will believe you."

And that was as far as he could get. Now, first and last, I guess there's been dozens of girls, not countin' all kinds of widows, that's had their blossoms out for Pinckney. He's been more or less interested in some; but when he really runs across one that's worth taggin' she does the sudden duck and runs him up against a game like this:

"And you're tryin' to make good, eh?" says I.

"What's your program?"

For Pinckney, he hadn't done so worse. First he hunts up the only aunt he's got on his list. She's a wide, heavy weight old girl, that's lost or mislaid a couple of husbands, but hasn't ever had any kids of her own, and puts in her time goin' to Europe and comin' back. She was just havin' the trunks checked for Bar Harbor when Pinckney locates her and tells how glad he is to see her again. Didn't she want to change her plans and stay a month or so with him and the twins at some nice place up in Westchester? One glimpse of Jack and Jill with their company manners on wins her. Sure, she will.

So it's up to Pinckney to hire a happy home for the summer, all found. Got any idea of how he tackles a job like that? Most folks would take a week off and do a lot of travelin', sizin' up different joints. They'd want to know how many bath rooms, if there was malaria, and all about the plumbin', and what the neighbors was like. But Livin' at the club don't put you wise to them tricks. Pinckney, he just rings up a real estate agent, gets him to read off a list, says, "I'll take No. 5," and it's all over. Next day they move out.

Was he stung? Well, not so bad as you'd think. Course, he's stuck about two prices for rent, and he signs a lease without readin' farther than the "Whereas"; but, barrin' a few things like hardware furniture and rooms that have been shut up so long they smell like the subcellars in a brewery, he says the ranch wan't so bad. The outdoors was good, anyway. There was lots of it, acres and acres, with trees, and flower gardens, and walks, and fish ponds, and everything you could want for a pair of youngsters that needed room. I could see that myself.

"Say, Pinckney," says I, as we drives in through the grounds, "if you can't get along with Jack and Jill in a place of this kind you'd better give up. Why, all you got to do is to turn 'em loose."

"Wait!" says he. "You haven't heard it all."

"Let it come, then," says I.

"We will look at the house first," says he.

The kids wan't anywhere in sight; so we starts right in on the tour of inspection. It was a big, old, slate roofed barn-like place, with jigsaw work on the eaves, and a lot of dinky towers frescoed with lightnin' rods. There was furniture to match, mostly the marble topped, black walnut kind, that was real stylish back in the '70's.

In the hall we runs across Snivens. He was the butler; but you wouldn't guess it unless you was told. Kind of a cross between a horse doctor and a missionary, I should call him—one of these



"Gwan, Ye Young Tarrer!" Says Pa.

short legged, barrel poled gent, with a pair of white wind harps trainin' up a putty colored tail that was ornamented with a set of the solemnest lookin' lamps you ever saw off a stuffed owl.

"Gee, Pinckney!" says I. "Who unloaded that on you?"

"Snivens came with the place," says he.

"He looks it," says I. "I should think that face would sour the milk. Don't he scare the twins?"

"Frighten Jack and Jill," says Pinckney. "Not if he had horns and a tail. They seem to take him as a joke. But he does make all the rest of us feel creasy."

"Why don't you write him his release?" says I.

"Can't," says Pinckney. "He is one of the conditions in the contract—he and the urns."

"The urns?" says I.

"Yes," says Pinckney, sighin' deep. "We are coming to them now. There they are."

With that we steps into one of the front rooms, and he lines me up before a white marble mantel that is just as cheerful and tasty as some of them pieces in Greenwood cemeteries. On either end was what looks to be a bronze flower pot.

"To your right," says Pinckney, "is Grandfather, to your left, Aunt Sabina."

"What's the jist?" says I.

"Shorty," says he, heavin' up another sigh, "you are now in the presence of sacred dust. These urns contain the sad fragments of two great Van Rusters."

"Fragments is good," says I. "Couldn't find many to keep, could they? Did they go up with a powder mill, or fall into a stone crusher?"

"Cremated," says Pinckney.

Then I gets the whole story of the two old maids that Pinckney rented the place from. They were the last of the clan. In their day the Van Rusters had headed the Westchester battin' list, ownin' about half the county and gettin' their names in the paper regular. But they'd been peterin' out for the last hundred years or so, and when it got down to the Misses Van Rusters, a pair of thin eaged, old battle axes that had never wore anything but crape and jet bonnets, there wan't much left of the estate except the mortgages and the urns.

Rentin' the place furnished was the last card in the box, and Pinckney turns up as the willin' victim. When he comes to size up what he's drawn, and has read over the lease, he finds he's put his name to a lot he didn't dream about. Keepin' Snivens on the pay roll, promisin' not to disturb the urns, usin' the furniture careful, and havin' the grass cut in the private burvin' lot was only a few that he could think of off hand.

"You ain't a tenant, Pinckney," says I; "you're a philanthropist."

"I feel that way," says he. "At first, I didn't know which was worse, Snivens or the urns. But I know now—it is the urns. They are driving me to distraction."

"Ah, do a lap!" says I. "Course, I give in that there might be better parlor ornaments than potted ancestors, specially when they belong to some one else; but they don't come extra, do they? I thought it was the twins that was worryin' you."

"That is where the urns come in," says he. "Here the youngsters are now. Step back in here and watch."

He pulls me into the next room where we could see through the draperies. There's a whoop and a hurrah outside, the door bangs, and in tumbles the kids, with a nurse taggin' on behind. The youngsters



They Introduce Me to Grandfather and Aunt Sabina.